

**Opening Statement of Chairman Henry J. Hyde
before the Full Committee**

**“United States Policy in Afghanistan: Establishing Democratic Governance and Security in
the Wake of Parliamentary Elections”**

**2172 Rayburn House Office Building
September 22, 2005**

The Committee will come to order.

The purpose of today’s hearing is to hear from Administration officials about the U.S. long-term commitment to Afghanistan. Members of this Committee hope to better understand the strategies in place to ensure the long-term stability and security of Afghanistan in the post-election period.

Since its liberation from the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan has made great strides in the political reconstruction process. In 2003, a constitution was drafted, debated and approved. Presidential elections were held in October 2004, and parliamentary and provincial elections were held this past Sunday.

Despite threats of violence by the Taliban to derail the elections and intimidation posed by local warlords, millions of Afghans turned out to vote, making a statement about their determination to support a democratic state governed by the rule of law and not by the rule of the gun.

The political reconstruction process outlined in the Bonn Agreement has played a crucial role in defining Afghanistan’s democratic development. However, Afghanistan still faces many challenges before democratic governance is secured. The international community must continue to be engaged in Afghanistan if the factors contributing to its instability are to be overcome. I support the call for a post-election road map coupled together with donor assistance that will strengthen the political process, empower Afghan institutions, and provide a measure of success for facing the challenges that lie ahead.

Initial reports suggest that voter turnout was significantly lower than the last national elections. Out of 12.5 million registered voters, six million participated in last Sunday's elections. This is an approximate decline of 20 percent compared with the presidential elections in October when voter turnout represented 70 percent of registered voters.

One year ago, in a hearing before this Committee, I emphasized the important role of the international community in supporting the ability of President Karzai to deliver real change to the Afghan people. I underscored the danger that Afghans might become disenchanted with the democratic process as a means to secure their livelihoods if their expectations were not met. Unfortunately, explanations accounting for the decreased voter turnout point in that direction. One young Afghan student who explained the meaning behind the declining rate of political participation by Afghan citizens said the following, "In my opinion, the expectations that people had from their President during the Presidential elections...were not fulfilled. And it led to frustration...And this frustration has made people have a different reaction to these elections."

I hope to hear from our witnesses today about what the U.S., the international community and President Karzai could have done differently to instill the confidence of the Afghan people in the integrity of the recent elections and a belief that voting is worthwhile. Looking to the future, what is being done to inspire trust in the political process?

While the final results won't be released until next month, there are signs that the National Assembly might become factionalized and vulnerable to corruption by powerful personalities. What remains to be seen is the impact which this will have on the Afghan government in developing viable democratic institutions that can effectively govern the people they are meant to serve.

One of the greatest threats to democratic governance in Afghanistan is the alarming rate of poppy production. While there has been some progress on reduction of opium cultivation, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), good weather and increased rains produced a bumper drug yield this year, so that Afghanistan still produced 4,100 tons of opium – 87 percent of the world's supply. These drugs will, in turn, fund terrorism, corrupt

democratic institutions such as the new parliament, and make democratic security much more difficult to produce.

Our own State Department opium eradication efforts did not reach expectations. We are also fearful of some stepping backwards by the Afghan Government in its commitment toward fighting drugs. Specifically, I am concerned that the Afghan Government may be wavering in its commitment to extradite some of the major drug lords who promote and deal in drugs, and who, ultimately, fund the terrorists from the billions of dollars which these narcotics generate.

The fact remains that a stable Afghanistan will require cooperation and strong effort by the Afghans. Security, counternarcotics, and rule of law must improve if Afghans are to have confidence in, and participate in, their emerging democracy. A lack of success in these areas will undermine the credibility of the democratic process and may risk demoralizing the aspirations of Afghan citizens and jeopardize their ability to actively shape and strengthen representative governing institutions.

President Karzai has shown courage in leading his nation under challenging circumstances. I hope that President Karzai will remain strong and hold corrupt officials accountable for their actions.

We have a distinguished panel before us today representing the Bush Administration. I look forward to hearing their testimonies today on these issues.

I will now yield to my colleague and friend, Ranking Democratic Member Tom Lantos, for any opening remarks he may wish to make.

Mr. Lantos.